JOHN CAGE
Music For Three
PŘEMYSL VOJTA
FLORENCE MILLET
YE WU
WDR
THE COLOGNE
BROADCASTS

JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

MUSIC FOR THREE (1984)*

1	Music for Three	15:26
2	Music for One	04:59
3	Music for Three	09:41
4	Music for One	02:15
5	Music for Three	26:13
6	Music for One	04:27
	Total Time	63:11

* World Premiere Recordings

Recordings: 28.+ 29. Juni 2022,
WDR Klaus-von-Bismarck-Saal

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Recording Producer, Editing,
Mastering & Mix: Stephan Hahn

Recording Eengineer: Enrique Foedtke

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PŘEMYSL VOJTA Horn
YE WU Violin
FLORENCE MILLET Piano

MUSIC FOR THREE ...

Chamber music repertoire is not exactly brimming with pieces written for the horn, violin, and piano lineup. In the early 1800s, Bohemian composer Johann Ladislaus Dussek and Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny experimented with the unusual combination. Then, in 1865, with his outstanding *Horn Trio in E Flat Major*, op. 40, Johannes Brahms set a benchmark against which all subsequent works would be measured. At first, only a handful of composers dared to subject themselves to comparison. However, in the 20th and 21st centuries, the stream of horn trio repertoire eventually started to expand. Composers including Kurt Schwertsik and Hermann Schroeder presented interesting attempts in the 1960s. Then, in 1982, in his *Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano*, György Ligeti latched on to the tradition stemming from Brahms's trio and revived general interest in this atypical combination of instruments.

With its high quality, Ligeti's trio could once more have become a pivotal work capable of breathing new life into the genre. But in contrast with the above-mentioned composers of the post-Brahms era, late 20th-century musical modernism was more prone to detach itself from the categorical standards set by potential benchmarks. It thus attained an astounding variety of individual approaches instead. Hans Abrahamsen, for instance, in his *Seks Stykker*, neither followed the lead of Brahms nor of Ligeti; instead, he reformulated his own solo piano works in a new instrumental lineup. The *Seks Stykker* were associated with an external occasion: namely, the Danish première of Ligeti's trio in 1984. Further composers are worth mentioning: Jean-Luc Darbellay (2003) and Friedrich Goldmann (2004), whose trios display a great pleasure in subtly combining sonorities resulting from this instrumental lineup. Daniel Schnyder's *Walden* (2011) even features a touch of jazz in a classical horn trio.

John Cage (1912-1992) holds his own special place amidst this stylistic pluralism. Although Cage did not specifically write a trio for horn, violin, and piano, his work *Music For* (1984) can be easily fleshed out in this instrumental lineup. *Music For* is a bundle of 17 parts that can be randomly associated with one another. Each possible combination represents an entirely valid version of the piece – ranging from a solo performance to piano duet, string quartet, or ensemble with voice. The version for horn trio is called *Music For Three*, and this version also allows for several performance alternatives:

Ye Wu: The piece has two violin parts. I chose the first one because the second one would have constantly clashed with the horn to see which one could gain the upper hand. This way, we can allow each other some space. I was truly surprised when I first saw Cage's notation with the symbols pointing up or down. These miniature glissandos occasionally sound like Chinese opera. At other points in the piece, it reminded us of *Zarathustra*. Cage was truly trying out a lot of different things. I find that horn, piano, and violin, with their differing timbres, offer the perfect lineup for this music.
Přemysl Vojta: Although the piece is chronologically not that far removed from Ligeti's horn trio, Cage chooses entirely different paths and uses the instruments in a thoroughly different way. When we were discussing together about the piece, the word "meditative" often came to mind, and I find it indeed quite fitting as a description of its tranquil demeanor. The horn part is generally quite slow. Shades of dynamics play a decisive role: they are what one needs to bring out the most.
Florence Millet: I've fallen in love with this trio: in my view, it works just as well as the horn trios of Abrahamsen, Ligeti, and Brahms. With the horn and the violin, we have two melodic instruments, while the piano provides a space for harmonies and resonance. The pianist also has the choice between two different parts. I have chosen "Piano one" after we took a precise look at where the resting points are located and the range the piano is covering. In this version, the piano often plays in an extremely high range. The dynamic markings vary widely from one note to the next, occasionally switching abruptly from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo* and vice versa. Although technically feasible, this is actually quite difficult to put into practice. And then we have those extended notes and rests, which present a further authentic challenge to the pianist.

In certain passages, Cage calls for the piano sounds to be produced by stroking the piano strings with the bowhairs of a string instrument bow. This calls to mind his interest in the timbre possibilities of the prepared piano, the basics of which he already learned while still a student of Henry Cowell in the 1920s. Towards the end of the 1930s, in his piano solo work *Bacchanale*, Cage instructed the performer to place a series of prepared objects inside the piano: this was a radical approach that went far beyond Cowell's original ideas. Cage's art of the prepared piano came to full fruition in his *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-48). He was particularly interested in hearing how the harmonics of piano notes can be altered when objects are made to resound along with the strings – an aspect he continued to explore almost four decades after the *Sonatas and Interludes* in the way he uses bowhair in the piano part of ***Music For Three***. This unconventional playing technique also allows the piano to produce long notes with a constant volume, thus making its sonority more similar to that of the horn and of the violin.

An important performance tool in ***Music For Three*** is the timer, which provides all three musicians a constant orientation along the timeline. Within the latter, Cage defines "time brackets" in the course of which the performers should play the elements indicated in their parts. Those elements are often fragmentary or extremely brief. On occasion, this is indicated by just one note. The performers decide how to "flesh out" these elements within the determined time slots. The time bracket principle is also pivotal in Cage's late work, the *Number Pieces*.

Florence Millet: We're allowed to set in for the first time whenever we want within the first 35 seconds. That is already the first freedom this piece allows us. As soon as we hear one of our colleague's notes, or the breath inhale that precedes it, we can react to what is going on. We feel a pulse – perhaps it's the rhythm of the planets, or the pulse of our lives – as if life was just one long inhalation and exhalation. What comes before it? Another inhalation and exhalation. That is what we discover in this piece. At many points, you have shorter rhythm or pulse values. For instance, I am pulling the bowhairs along the strings. That comes from a movement in my body. I need to pay close attention to the kind of sound this produces, including which harmonics, and whether Přemysl or Ye are playing while I am carrying this out. All of a sudden, I realize: this is the point where the next note should come. It is a recognition that emerges from a simultaneous interplay of body, movement, and instinct, almost like dancing a waltz.

Ye Wu: This is practically a live recording, as it reflects all the beautiful freedoms this work contains. After the second or third take, we had already found a point in time where we would meet together. As Přemysl knew that I'm allowed to play after 9'40'', he chose to hold his note for 30 seconds at that point. He could have held it even longer, but I knew that I can fully trust him. We're also dealing with a kind of freedom when such moments emerge quasi-spontaneously from our playing without having to plan them together beforehand.

Přemysl Vojta: John Cage's *Music For Three* allows us such freedoms and possibilities. That is why this music emerges so fresh and turns out differently every time it is performed on stage or in the recording studio. For me, it's been a thrilling experience, this way of dealing with time and the position we occupy within it – thanks to a score that always allows us to find that standpoint and interpret it anew.

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PŘEMYSL VOJTA French Horn

Přemysl Vojta, winner of the „International ARD Music Competition“ 2010, tours worldwide as a soloist with orchestras such as the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Camerata Salzburg, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Prague Philharmonia and the Kanagawa Symphony Orchestra. After his successful debut at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, Přemysl was awarded the prestigious Beethoven Ring, past recipients of which include artists such as Igor Levit, Lisa Batiashvili and Gustavo Dudamel. Přemysl Vojta has received much international acclaim for his exceptional album productions, including one complete recording of the horn concertos by Joseph and Michael Haydn, and his album *Metamorphosis*, which was recorded using three different types of horns.

In October 2021, Přemysl Vojta was appointed as a professor of horn at Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen to succeed the horn legends Hermann Baumann and Frank Lloyd. In the past, he has also taught at Berlin University of the Arts and the Cologne University of Music and Dance.

At the age of 10, Přemysl Vojta received his first horn education from Olga Voldánová at the Brno Music School. A talented competitive swimmer at the time, Vojta had to choose between sports and music, but soon enough, his heart was set on the instrument. Later, he pursed his studies at the Prague Conservatory under the mentorship of Bedřich Tylšar (1998-2004) and at Berlin University of the Arts under Christian-Friedrich Dallmann (2004-2010). While he was a student, Přemysl Vojta had already started his career as a principal hornist at the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra, and continued holding the same position at the WDR Symphony Orchestra in Cologne until 2019.

Vojta is a member of the Carousel Ensemble, PhilHarmonia Octets, Breeze Quintets and Dispar Trios. His chamber music partners include Tobias Koch, Annelien van Wauwe, Fabrice Millischer, Oliver Triendl, the Pražák Quartet and the Armida Quartet.

Přemysl Vojta plays a Mod. 3 double horn from Klaus Fehr Horns, natural horns from Jungwirth and Curtois Paris and the F horn by Daniel Fuchs Vienna.

www.premyslvojta.com

YE WU Violin

Chinese violinist Ye Wu took her first violin lessons in her home town Shanghai before continuing her studies in the USA as well as in Berlin. As concertmaster, she has been invited to perform with many orchestras, playing under such conductors as Kurt Masur, Kent Nagano and Christoph Eschenbach. She has performed extensively in America and Europe as a soloist.

Ye Wu has attracted attention with numerous recordings and concerts as a chamber musician, particularly in recent years as Primaria of the WDR Chamber Players. In 2017 their recording of the string quintets by Johannes Brahms, released by the Pentatone label, was awarded the Diapason d‘Or. Their newest CD of the string quintets and octet by Max Bruch was rewarded the Choc de Classica in 2021.

Since 2014 she has been second concertmaster in the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne. Ye Wu plays a Joseph Rocca violin (1851), on loan from Mr. Jianquan Ge and Mr. Peng Bai.

FLORENCE MILLET Piano

Florence Millet, of Franco-German descent, performs with orchestra, in recitals and ensembles in venues across Europe, Asia and the Americas. Conductors she worked with are Charles Dutoit, Robert Kapilow, Pascal Verrot, Simon Blech, Heinz Holliger, Julia Jones, Elena Schwartz, Jonathan Darlington. She is a founding member of the Lions Gate Trio, since 1988. Residencies include Tanglewood Festival, Universities of North-Carolina-Greensboro, Yale, W. Hartford and the Fairfield Library, CT. A professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln, she was Chair of the Piano Department from 2018 and was elected Executive Director of its Wuppertal Campus in 2021.

She has worked worked closely with renowned composers: Luciano Berio, Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, George Crumb, Johannes Schöllhorn, Jörg Widmann, Hans Werner Henze, Hans Abrahamsen. She played with the Ensemble Intercontemporain under Pierre Boulez and David Robertson from 1992-2000.

Millet received her master's and doctoral degrees at State University of New York Stony Brook, where she studied with Gilbert Kalish. Her other mentors were Leon Fleisher, Paul Badura Skoda, Peter Serkin and Jean Hubeau.
Florence Millet is the artistic adviser for the Lichterfeld Foundation, promoting tolerance, intercultural understanding and creator of the Echospore.de platform which propagates music from persecuted composers.

She explores multidisciplinary concert formats with actors, choreography and dance (Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch) and arts in the Tony Cragg Foundation, Van der Heydt-Museum, The Phillips Collection, 70th anniversary of „Rundgang" Music of the time (Musik der Zeit), or lecture recitals.

www.florencemillet.com

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PŘEMYSL VOJTA Horn · YE WU Violin · FLORENCE MILLET Piano

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